

instance in the education and training of those similarly handicapped.

Already the Church allows some opportunities to the disabled; a man with an artificial leg can be ordained a priest; if a priest becomes blind he may be given permission to say Mass and can preach and hear confessions. Today the blind can receive a first-class education; might not a man blind from childhood some day be allowed to reach the priesthood? A number have already been successful and distinguished in the Anglican ministry.

Religious associations of the kind suggested would be an eloquent protest against the materialism of the time. The word 'rehabilitation' is often used nowadays; to restore the sick and injured as far as possible to health and activity is a good Christian work, but too often now there is the implication of making the sufferer self-supporting so that he may not be a burden upon the State. For the materialist the corollary of rehabilitation is euthanasia; if the disabled cannot be made fit enough to look after themselves and to work, the modern pagan state would prefer to see them painlessly killed. To Christians it is left to show that in this world the life of the spirit can triumph over bodily infirmity, so that at the last day the body, gloriously risen and once more perfect, may be re-united to the soul in life everlasting.

HOURS WITH ST JEROME

By

HUGH POPE, O.P., S.T.M., D.S.S.

THOUGH perhaps most people who are at all familiar with them appreciate the writings of St Augustine, comparatively few feel any attraction for those of St Jerome who, unlike St Augustine, has left us no sermons or devotional treatises, his work consisting for the most part of technical Commentaries and minute disquisitions on difficult passages of Holy Scripture.

Both Saints have left us a vast correspondence. But how their letters differ! If we except Augustine's earlier ones, his philosophical discussions during his first days as a Christian, the remainder are for the most part the outpourings of a shepherd of souls; the same is true of his sermons which lend themselves to quotation at every turn and wherein the devout can always find food for their souls. St Jerome, too, has left us many spiritual letters. But we get the impression that such letters were not his life's work; he writes them almost under protest as though feeling that they are stealing time from the real work to which God has called him, that of translating and commenting on the Bible. This work, and the controversial work thrust upon him by the needs of the Church, procured him many enemies who slandered and calumniated him in most ungenerous fashion. He himself attacked no one save in self-defence, but when he did speak out there was no

doubt about what he meant. And though he repeatedly says that he deliberately abstains from naming his critics, he yet uses nicknames for them which only provided the thinnest of disguises.

He could, too, say harsh things; even his great admirer Cassiodorus speaks of Jerome's *mordacitas*, or biting tongue, which led a modern writer to say that Jerome was born many centuries too early and would have made an excellent editor of some 'yellow press' newspaper. But these things are by the way and do not concern us here, though it is well to point out that no one was more conscious of his failing in this respect than was Jerome himself. Nor were his friends, Marcella and Pammachius, slow to admonish him. When he remarked of certain *homunculi* who had criticised him that it was 'waste of time to sing on a harp to an ass', he wrote to Marcella: 'I know well that when you read this you will wrinkle your forehead fearing that my freedom of speech will only breed frequent quarrels, and you will itch to put your fingers on my lips' (Ep. xxvii). Pammachius, too, felt that in his attack on Jovinian he had not been too discreet (Ep. xlviii).

When pointing out grammatical errors on the part of Rufinus he says: 'I am not looking for things to criticise; it is for him to show me any which do not call for criticism' (*Adv. Rufinum* i. 17). His hatred for heretics and their doctrines leads him to speak of Arius as that *daemonium meridianum* (*Adv. Rufinum* ii 17). Nor can he resist an opportunity of making bad puns on some unhappy adversary's name: Vigilantius becomes of course 'Dormitantius'. A Scotsman, too, may well feel aggrieved at Jerome's awful indictment of his nation. He may, however, draw comfort from the fact that Jerome regarded British and Scotch peoples as one and the same! But perhaps that only aggravates the insult! But these blemishes, if we may so call them, must not blind us to the deep spirituality of the Hermit of Bethlehem, who was not only the profoundest of scholars but one of the greatest of saints; one too, who, like his contemporary St Augustine, trained an army of saints and scholars to carry on his work.

The passages which are given here, most of them very brief, are of the nature of *obiter dicta*—flashes, as it were, lighting up his Commentaries and affording, unconsciously on the writer's part, relief from what is often almost too solid reading; part of their charm lies in their wholly unexpected character.

Few perhaps have the chance of consulting the original which, owing to Jerome's condensed style and his determination never to waste words, is exceedingly difficult to translate. But in translating I have tried to act on the principle Jerome himself lays down: 'I emphatically assert that in translating Greek authors I have not—save in the case of Holy Scripture where the very order of the words is itself a sacrament (*mysterium*)—translated word for word but meaning for meaning, or, as Horace, *Ars poetica*, expresses it, "Non verbum verbo curabis reddere, fidus interpres".'

The following extracts may, it is hoped, serve to show the hermit, the scholar, the controversialist and the translator as he really was. They may, too, induce some readers to turn to the original and read at least his inimitable letters.

ST JEROME

1. TRUTH

Whilst we are living in this frail vessel of the body we imagine that the zeal exhibited for us by such as love us is a help, and that our enemies' assaults do us harm. But when this dust shall have returned to the dust whence it came, and when pallid death shall have withdrawn from this present scene not alone us who write but those who pour scorn on our writings, when another generation shall be in possession and fresh trees shall have replaced those that have fallen, then it will no longer be question of names of high repute but only of the quality of the work; no one intending to read the book will trouble to ask the author's name; his sole concern will be the value of the work he is sitting down to read. He will not ask whether the writer was a bishop or a layman, an emperor or a squire, soldier or servant, whether he was clothed in purple or in silk or in the cheapest rags; nor will he be impressed by any title the writer may possess, but solely by the quality of his work (*Prologue to Bk. II on Osee*).

Though an ascetic life is of great value, and continence of more importance than bodily mortification, yet nothing is so mortifying as knowledge of the truth (*on Nahum ii. 1*).

2. PURGATORY

The Seraphim who ever stand before the throne of God to praise him, are also sent on divers missions, more especially to those who need purification, and, who, for the sins of their former life, to meet you with bands of virgins in her train! (*Ep. xxii. 41*).

3. HEAVEN

Stand for a moment outside the prison of your body and try to picture the reward for your toils here, a reward which 'eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man'. What a day that will be when Mary the Lord's Mother comes to meet you with bands of virgins in her train! (*Ep. xxii, 41*).

4. HOLINESS

What a difference there is between a holy simplicity and a learned holiness (*Ep. liii. 3*). Some mistake a crass simplicity for sanctity, and therefore proclaim themselves disciples of the fishermen; as though they were holy simply because ignorant! (*Ep. xxvii. 1*).

5. ASS AND HARP

It is a thankless task to play on the harp to an ass (*Ep. xxvii. 1*).

6. WRITERS AND READERS

No writer so unskilled that he cannot find a reader equally so (*Prot. to Bk. xii on Isaias*).

Men write books, and then have to leave them to the mercy of critical readers (*on Eccles. iv*).

Apologising for his youthful attempt at a Commentary on *Abdias*, a copy of which he came across in Italy, he says: 'I confess I was amazed to find that no matter how badly a person wrote he could always find some reader as bad as himself' (*Prol. to Com. on Abdias*).

7. MODERN CRITICS

I am aware that former ecclesiastical writers, Greeks as well as Latins, have said much about this *Book of Jonas* and, by the questions they have ventilated, have not brought out, but rather have obscured, its meaning. So much is this the case that their interpretation of it calls itself for an interpreter, and the reader lays the work down more bewildered than he was before he read it (*Prologue to Commentary on Jonas*). Jonas himself is styled by Jerome 'animosus Propheta', that 'fearless Prophet' (*Ep. xxxix 3*).

8. NATIVITY

The saints can grasp the mystery of Christ's Nativity rather by believing it than by trying to express it in words (*on Isa. liii*).

8. PLEASURE SEEKERS

Men who live for pleasure fail to arrive, by a study of created things, at a knowledge of the Creator, nor do they consider the works of his hands (*on Isa. v*).

10. THE CREATOR

To whom shall we liken God when we reflect on his power and his majesty? Should we not rather arrive at some understanding of the Creator from the marvels he has wrought? (*on Isaias xl*).

11. PURGATORY

A man's work may have been burned and thus perished in that fire, and all his labour prove wasted; yet while it is true that he has forfeited the reward of his toil, he himself will be saved, though at the cost of being purified by fire. But that man whose work has survived will be saved without having to undergo that purification. Salvation surely differs in their respective cases (*Adv. Jovinianum ii. 22*).

12. GOD IS PRESENT IN OUR SOULS

There is no place where God is not present. To all, especially to such as are holy, he draws nigh; even so closely as the clothes cling to our bodies (*on Jeremias xxiii. 24*).

13. WISDOM

A man who is himself wise has the best right to be called happy; next to him is he who listens to a wise man (*quoted from Hesiod*). Jerome adds: But he who is neither the one nor the other is of no use to himself nor to anyone else (*on Isa. iii. 3*).

14. MARTYRS

All the martyrs, then, those saints who have shed their blood

for Christ's sake, those too whose whole life has been a martyrdom, whose bodies now lie in the dust, shall all rise and praise God their Creator (*on Isa. xxvi. 19*).

15. THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

So long as we are in this present world and have been brought out of Egypt, we ascend by degrees, passing first of all through desert and uninhabitable stretches where no holy man ought to be; it is a pathless land, and that makes our journey difficult. It is a thirsty land too wherein we are ever yearning for better things and never content with the present; a land of fanciful images, of 'the shadow of death', a place where we are always in danger and wherein the devil is ever laying snares for us, a land, finally, 'wherein no man sojourns' who has arrived at the fullness of his age in Christ. For we shall all rise unto the perfect man, to the measure of the fullness of age in Christ. No one who is a man of God, nor indeed any son of man, permanently abides in this land but is for ever hastening on to better things. It is clear, then, that there is no such thing as perfection so long as we are on the way, but only in the goal to which the way leads, in those mansions prepared in heaven for the saints (*on Jeremias ii. 6*).

16. LAITY

It may be that the general body of the people of God is not in a position to be familiar with doctrine; this is excusable in their case, for through lack of experience of God they cannot be expected to know his behests. But the clergy, and those whose business it is to guide the laity, have known the will of the Lord and are well aware of the judgment of their God (*on Jeremias v. 4*).

17. RUFINUS

Rufinus, dumb himself, barks with the bark of that great, fat dog of Albion (Pelagius) who is better able to fight with his heels than with his teeth. For he derives his ancestry from the people of Scotland, near to Britain (*Prologue to Book III on Jeremias*).